Darden Restaurants Announces 2007 'William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award' Winners

ORLANDO, Fla., May 22, 2007 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX News Network/ -- Over the course of a year, Darden Restaurants, Inc. serves more than 300 million guests in 1,400 restaurants throughout North America. To provide the wide assortment of fresh ingredients and preparations that support its diverse menu offerings, Darden works with more than 2,000 different suppliers. Of that group, a select few are recognized each year with the "William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award."

(The logo: http://www.newscotland.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20050203/FLTH026LOGO)

The award - named for the late founder of Darden restaurants - recognizes suppliers who provide innovative products and services that contribute to Darden's success. Chosen by Darden's culinary, purchasing, total quality and marketing teams, recipients are recognized at the National Restaurant Association's "Restaurant & Hotel-Motel Show" in Chicago.

"The 2007 award recipients have been instrumental in Darden's success this past year," said Darden chief executive Clarence Otis. "We are fortunate to have strategic partnerships with companies that are at the forefront of the food service industry."

This year, eight companies were recognized.

-- Ecolab Equipment Care, GC Service, Inc. participated in an oven upgrade and grill calibration program that helped Olive Garden deliver one of its most profitable promotions.

-- Lakeview Farms provided five products to Bahama Breeze that reduced cost and complexity while increasing guest satisfaction.

-- Lotito Foods offset costs, reduced returns and provided an overnight emergency delivery service. In addition, Lotito created new dishes and sponsored Italian culinary tours for Darden employees.

-- Microsoft released a revised software product that enabled Darden to significantly reduce operating costs, as well as technology and operational business disruptions. This software product helped to improve service at Darden restaurants.

-- Promarisco S.A. was the first shrimp supplier to adopt a vendor-managed inventory program.

-- SaveOn Seafood was the first fresh fish and shellfish provider to go live with I-Kitchen - an online program used to manage restaurant product orders and inventories.

-- T. Marzetti created several sauces for Red Lobster with attention to quality and pricing, and developed 12 new salad dressings and sauces for Smokey Bones Barbeque & Grill within a very short timeframe.

-- Windsor Foods participated in Olive Garden's national campaign for stuffed rigatoni - the restaurant's most successful promotion to date. In addition, Windsor helped develop several new, distinctive forms of pasta, including ravioloni and lasagnette.

Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) of Orlando, Fla., is the nation's largest casual dining company in sales and market share. The company owns and operates nearly 1,400 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones and Seasons 52 restaurants and employs more than 150,000 people.

SOURCE Darden Restaurants, Inc.

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